

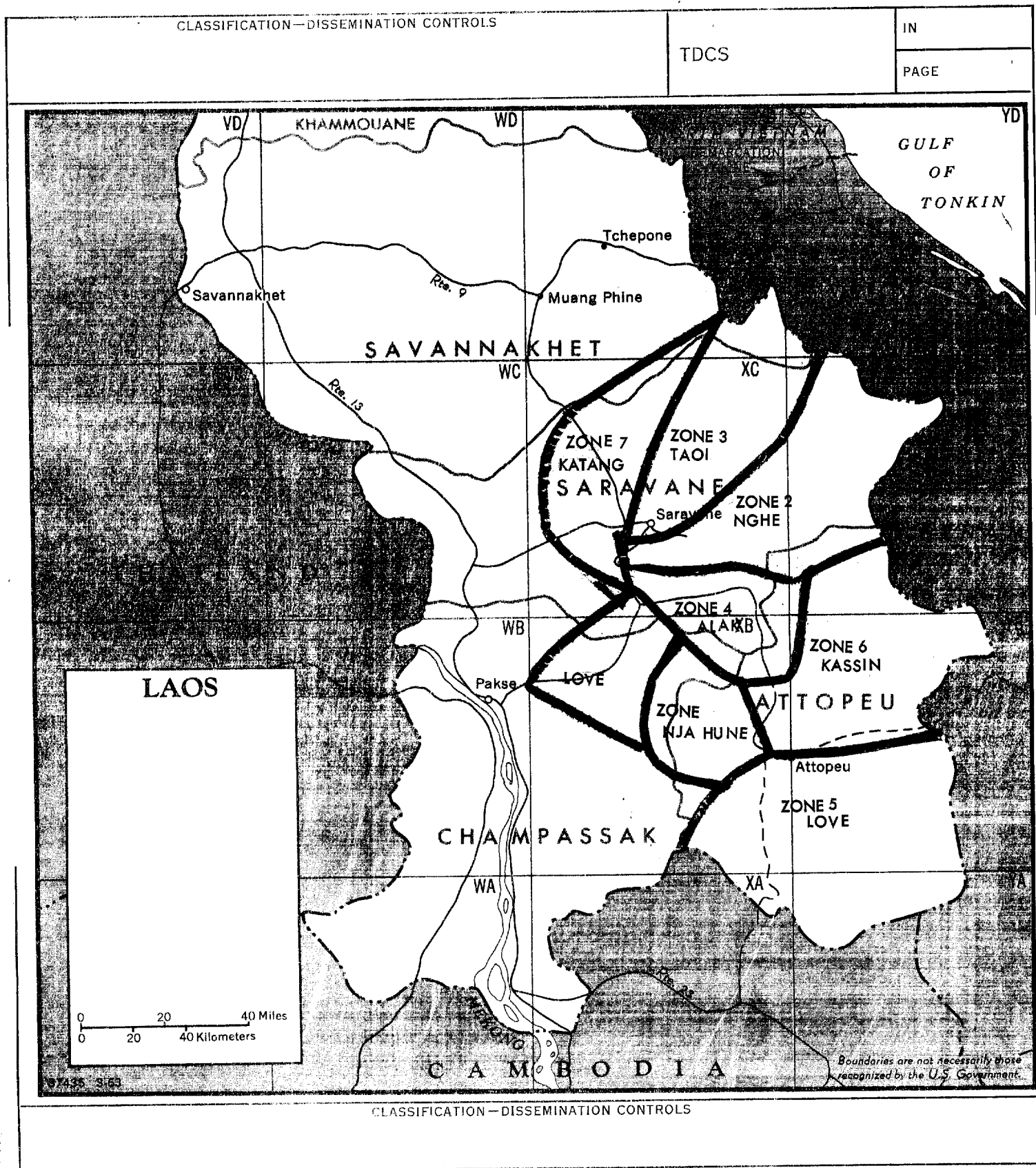
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CIA Rice-Roots Programs

in Vietnam and Laos

(Laos)

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25 August 1965

Tribal Program in Laos

Chart Number Six represents the CIA tribal program in Laos. The red area is primarily under Pathet Lao and Viet Cong influence. The blue is the area where CIA operations in Laos have established primary influence. The areas where the blue and red overlap show where our tribal assets flow into Communist areas, winning over the population and forming base areas to collect intelligence and conduct harassment operations. The red arrows indicate routes of Communist infiltration, in the North from Communist China and North Vietnam into Laos, and in the South from Communist controlled areas of Laos into South Vietnam.

we established contact with a tribal group called the Meo, who wanted to defend themselves and their villages against Communist domination. The Meo, who live in the North and Northeast portion of Laos at altitudes of 3,000 feet and above, slash and burn the

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sides of hills to grow dry rice. Their villages are primitive but they have a strong sense of family and tribal ties. We selected a few natural leaders and trained them in organization, unconventional warfare, radio communications, and how to collect intelligence on the Communists. We then provided these leaders and their followers with arms and ammunition to defend their villages. The program grew, more villages were armed, more leaders trained and now this Meo program in North and Northeast Laos, stretching right up to the borders of North Vietnam, involves 23,000 armed people who in turn protect 175,000 villagers. Beginning in 1963 we did the same thing in Northwest Laos where we called it the Yao program. In Northwest Laos we now have 5,000 armed tribals who defend a population of 45,000. Between the Meo and Yao areas we have trained and armed 1,000 Lao army irregulars, called the Armee Clandestine, who link up these two tribal programs. In the panhandle of Laos, the Central portion of the country, there are few people living in a desolate and rugged area, so here we organized the Lao into mobile teams and concentrated primarily on training them as road watchers and trail watchers to obtain intelligence on the known and suspected Viet Cong infiltration routes from North Vietnam through Laos into South Vietnam. In Central

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Laos we now have 1,800 men trained and formed into patrols and nine road watch teams. All teams are equipped with radios, and thus are able to provide daily information on movements of enemy troops and supplies through the main arteries of the Ho Chi Minh Trail to South Vietnam and to Communist controlled areas of Laos. In South Laos we have developed another tribal program following the same general pattern of teaching simple people how to defend themselves and protect their families against the Communists. This southern effort, generally referred to as the Kha program, now has 2,000 armed tribals, helping defend a population of 60,000. Once we begin work with tribals in a selected area it is essential to arm them as quickly as possible. This is because the Communists, learning of the tribal's cooperation with us, usually waste little time in moving in to punish them and/or reestablish their influence. If the tribals have been trained and armed to defend themselves and are successful in defeating the initial Communist reaction, an important psychological impact is made which immeasurably contributes to CIA's efforts to work in that particular area.

Our tribal program in Laos is a country team effort under the direction of the Ambassador and fully supported by AID. AID provides

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food, tools, and other materiel to help these people construct schools, hospitals, bridges and roads while they defend themselves against the Communists. CIA provides the training in unconventional warfare, the arms and munitions, communications and overall guidance on how to fight the Communists while maintaining, defending and building their villages. The idea is to give them something to fight for and the knowledge and equipment to do so. Some of the areas in the tribal programs have been occupied as many as four times within one year by the Communists. When the people leave in the face of a Communist military probe, they take with them everything; their cattle, their chickens and their entire household. The Communists occupy the area using considerable manpower. Later they withdraw the majority of their troops for use in other areas and our tribals then move back and forcibly reoccupy their villages and start building again. This fluid movement back and forth is characteristic of how these tribes defend their area by giving ground but then retaking it and reestablishing their influence.

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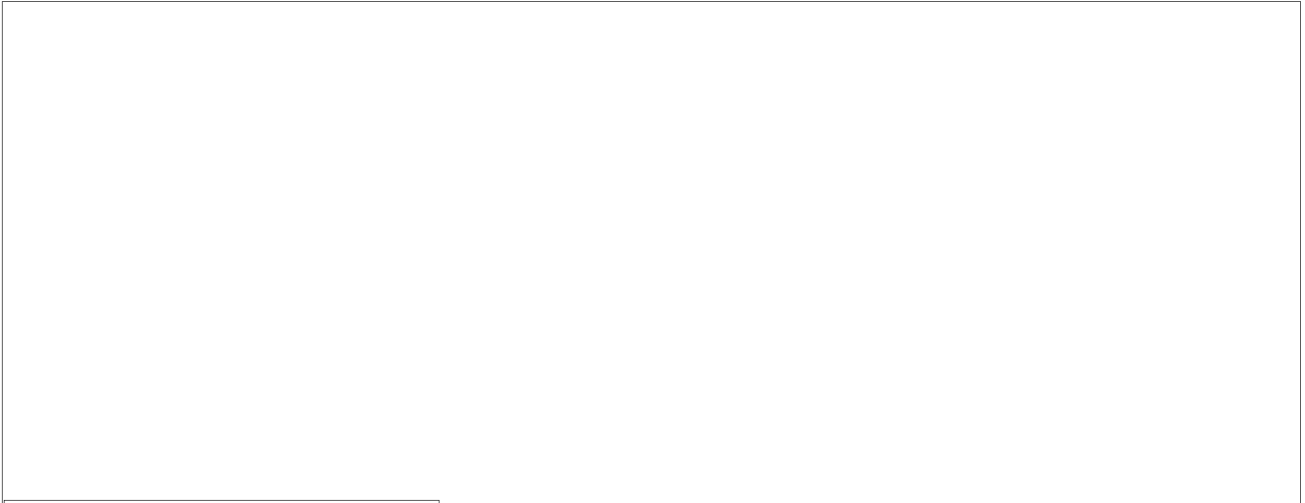
The total program in Laos defends 295,000 people with 34,000 armed tribals. CIA has 45 officers committed to this program,

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We have over 150 small landing strips throughout

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the country where small planes can take in supplies to outlying areas and move selected personnel in and out. We also have 145 radio stations communicating to the main base transmitting intelligence and providing a means for coordinating activities.

An important aspect of the Laos tribal program is that while we are helping the tribals to develop their own leadership and institutions and strengthening their ability to defend themselves we are also trying to help lessen economic and political differences between the tribes and the urban Lao elite. In other words, while strengthening the tribals we are working to increase their feeling of national identity and loyalty to Laos as a nation.

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Helicopters departing on a search and rescue mission in Northeast Laos. The bare hillside shows where dry rice has been cultivated using slash and burn methods. A small landing strip is visible on the ridge in the center.

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C-123 resupplying guerrilla base

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Reception of supply drop at the base

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Monsoon rains on the base landing strip

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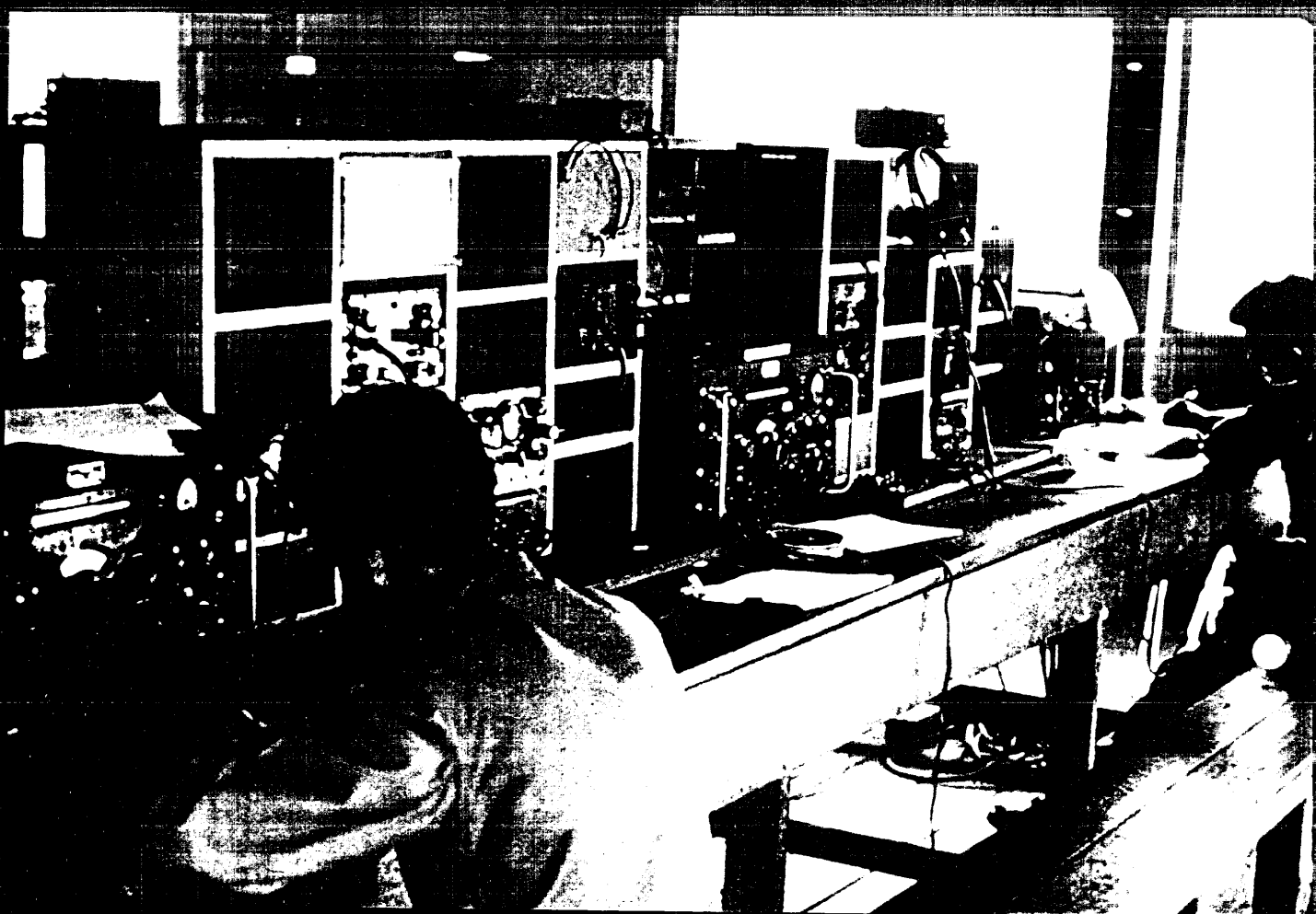
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Guerrilla command post

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Ground to air communications from forward base

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Short take-off and landing strip at Meo outpost

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Guerrilla base radio station

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Porter aircraft resupplying guerrillas

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Guerrilla patrol

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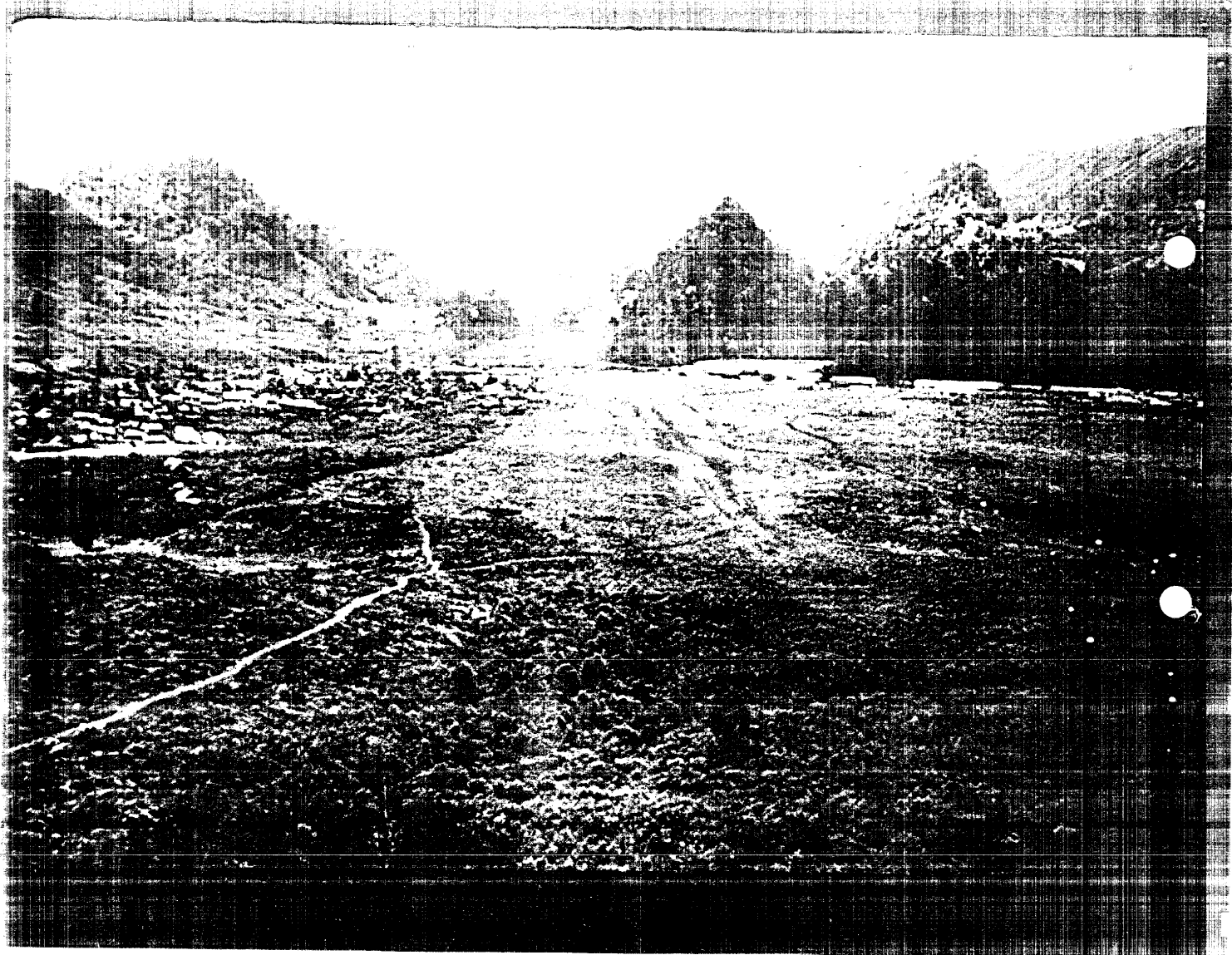
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A Yao tribal village in Laos

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